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ABSTRACT

The operation of the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation is almost exclusively based upon "instructional television" programing and production. The corporation operates one of the two Swedish television channels and is state-sponsored; thus, its failure to develop high quality programing is particularly distressing. Reasons for dull and other wise low quality programing lie in the inadequate understanding of the full nature of audiovisual communication and in the low level of visual literacy on the part of television production specialists. Educational films made for Swedish television need to take into account the emotional and nonverbal qualities of television as well as the rational and verbal facets of the medium that are presently stressed. Audiences, too, must be made aware of the manipulative powers of mass media, espeially television. The goal for Swedish educational television should be the creation of lively, relevant, and honest programing content. (CH)

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Paper to the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association in Montreal, Canada, April 25 - 28, 1973.

Allow me to start with a few facts.
The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation is a semi-state-organization. It employs 4,000 people. Its annual budget is about 100 million US dollars. It broadcasts yearly 20.000 hours of radio över three channels and about 4.000 hours of television över two channels. Its organization closely resembles that of the British Broadcasting Corporation, but in Sweden radio and television broadcasting is a monopoly. The expenses are covered entirely by fees - no commercial broadcasting is permitted.Certain laws and regulations are intended to guarantee the matter-of-fact-ness and the impartiality of the programmes.

The maximum potential audience for radio and television in Sweden is estimated to be 5,4 million people. At an average the Swedes listen to radio two hours a day and watch television at the same rate.

The Corporation might be said to operate freely on its own responsibility.

Needless to say, every aspect of modern life is dealt with in the programmes. Needless to say also - especially here; many people object to the treatment of various problems in radio and television.

In a scale that I suppose could astonish and amuse a foreign observer all aspects of broadcasting in Sweden are endlessly debated within and without the Corporation.

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One could - a bit frivolous - state that working in the Corporation means working in a nutshell of weden.

Somewhere close to the core of the nut, then, there is a personnel department. A section of this department takes care of the training of the staff. For eight years I have been head of the staff training section.

In the programme for this conference my paper has been given the title "Swedish Radio and Television - an insider's view". I might be said to work in a position that could give me an opportunity to comment critically on radio and television programming in Sweden. But if this is what you expect of me, I am afraid that I will make you disappointed. Instead I have choosen to translate - at the best of my ability - an article that I wrote for a Swedish magazine a few years ago. It was published under the title: " Are we being manipulated by television ?"

It is an effort to define some of the basic conditions of television programme production.

The article then:
At the staff training department of the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation we often show a short film, that has, we believe, given us some insight. The film lasts for only 2 ½ minutes. It deals with the question of the state paying part of the dental service bill for every citizen. It was televised in the beginning of the sixties. It is a classic.

What you see is a young lady entering a dental clinic. She sits down in the dentist's chair. The scene is peaceful, almost serene. These pictures are accompanied by a report, written and read by a man, who is now known as one of the best foreign correspondents of the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. The report is admirably clear and concentrated. To distill the journalistic essentials of a Royal Swedish Commission Investigation is an art in itself, and the reporter is an artist - in that respect. He knows a lot about the written word, but little about

television.

When he has been talking for 20 seconds it happens. To this moment the film has been showing the persons in a long shot. Now it is cut to a close up. In this close up you see the needle of the anaesthetic syringe being injected. The close-up is very close indeed.

From this moment on and to the end of the film the audience is broken. People squirm in their chairs, they cover their eyes, they protest.

But the syringe is not enough. Soon the friendly female dentist hauls down her dental burr, starts it and attacks the enamel of the tooth. There is now a close-up of sound. The audience shudders, whimpers and tries to cover the ears with the same hands that a moment ago were meant to hide the close-up picture of the syringe.

The reporter goes on talking. Among other things he says that four Swedish women out of five in the lowest social group have full dentures.

After the film I ask:
- How many women in the lowest social group have full dentures?
Three- I repeat three - out of some 200 people who have watched the film under these conditions have been able to answer the question. Those three have admitted that they have kept their eyes closed during the entire film.

My approach is certainly not scientific, but it suggests - I think - roads for further research.

What happens in that film?
To put it shortly - and in order to avoid all sorts of psychological and physiological complications - I suggest that the remarkable process of identification, that has nourished writers

for centuries and film directors for decades, puts the audience in the situation of the dental patient. All of a sudden the syringe is injected in my gum. The burr works on my teeth. The pain is mine. Or nearly mine.

We normally use the film to awaken an interest in the study of the picture-and sound language - the language of film and television.

The film - I believe - shows immediately and effectively that the emotionally active message of the picture beats the spoken word, if the latter is wrongly timed. To this simple point of view must then be added the BBC-insight that each given scene has an optimal length and that the accompanying words can extremely enhance the message of the pictures, once the wording is properly timed.

My first suggestion then to those who are in command of scientific methods is to study as closely as possible the optimal conditions of the interplay of picture and sound.

But the film is instructive in many ways, mostly perhaps in its unintentional but documentary brutality.

It is instructive to those who consider the effects of mass-media and - consequently - the soon classical problem of the so-called objectivity of radio and television and the methods of measuring it.

There is a Swedish professor of political science, who has shown, not without elegance, how the demands by all pressure groups on a monopolized medium can be ordered in a hierachy. At the top of the scale of values there is objectivity. Objectivity may then be divided into matter-of-fact-ness and impartiality. On the basic level one can specify the matter-of-fact-ness into truth and relevance, and impartiality into balance and neutral presentation. After such an analysis it is possible - says the

professor - to measure the degree of objectivity of any given radio or TV programme.

Without questioning the scientific ambition of the professor's work I would like to maintain that its value is mostly academic. Frankly speaking, I think that he studies another problem than the alleged one.

What he measures is the spoken word, typed out and read afterwards.

Let us return for a second to the dental thriller. If you read the commentary typed out there will be no doubt that it is matter-of fact and impartial. It is also relevant and neutrally presented. It is almost flawless.

But very few in the million people audience - excluding perhaps the dentists, who may comment upon the clinic - have grasped anything but the first 20 seconds.

Thus, if you study only the spoken word, typed out and read afterwards, you miss almost the whole story. All this may seem self-evident, but the method is used not only in Sweden, but all over the place.

Concerning the picture-sound language we lack all tools of measurement. So we stick to the ones that are available.

The analysis of content is possible only because the written word stands to the reader's free disposal. In a written text one can return, think, compare, question. In the written word there is in fact a two-way-communication.

There is also, of course, a two way communication in the spoken word or in the printed picture. You can debate anything with anyone in the everyday personal encounter situation, or you may scan the printed picture at your free will. But as soon as it comes to one-way-communication in radio and television you are the victim of the producers.

The reason is very simple but sometimes overlooked. The full significance of the spoken sentence cannot be grasped until the sentence is finished. Immediately afterwards - in radio - comes the next sentence. Every effort to analyze a sentence critically in the present leads the listener away from the following sentences.

Not unlike the participant of a political meeting the radio listener plays a role, the ultimate meaning of which is obscure to him. He is more or less willingly brought into a tale, the truth of which he can question first after the end of the programme. Mostly he does not do that. Instead - as has been shown in recent research by our audience research department - his selective perception will make him remember the things he wants to remember, and forget or omit the facts that do not fit his illusion of reality.

If he is not vaccinated against propaganda - and in audiences of millions of people many are not so - he is furthermore unaware of the charms and powers of the producers. They select their subjects. They choose their speakers and interviewees. They vary their interview technique. They use sound effect and music to suit their aims. They edit almost all material. By means of accentuation and pausing they imperceptibly guide the listener in the desired direction. In radio one has at least 20 variables at one's disposal, all of them with a real but immeasureable effect mainly on the emotions and prejudices of the listener.

There are good reasons to believe that only the emotional information has any lasting influence upon the attitudes of the listeners.

How are/ such emotional influences measured? In audiences of millions of people?

In television all the effects of radio are multiplied and

amplified. This can be seen already in the audience situation.

You may listen to radio while doing something else, washing dishes, driving your car, etc. But the lucid TV screen cries for attention. And attention it gets, attracting 2 - 4 million Swedes to watch television 15 hours per week. Now - who makes a meaningful content analysis of a flood of 4.000 hours of TV-programmes a year? Are there any ways of measuring it?

In mathematical information theory the unit of measurement is the bit, which may be defined as a measure of the uncertainty between a "yes" or "no" answer to a question.

I have been trying to find a connection between the bit as a concept and the fact that television today drowns hundreds of millions of people with billions of bits per second. I have failed.

Leaving the nano-second area one hopefully enters the millisecond one. It has lately been shown at the Bell laboratories that that the perception of one familiar symbol takes from 10 to 30 milliseconds. Since film and television normally operates at the 40 millisecond level - except in high speed photography - one might be comforted by the fact that the brain seems to be a little more rapid than film and television. One further knows that the short-time memory of the brain can keep 8 - 10 familiar symbols for about 300 - 400 milliseconds, before they either leave the focus of attention or are placed in the long-time memory. Somewhere here - at the level of 10 film frames or one third of a second - there is, I believe, a hope of finding a unit of measurement that is more useful to television production in practice than the bit.

Some practical work is now done on this time level. To use an American film, titled "Time Capsule" - a bit "underground" I think - that describes the whole history of the United States of America. The film lasts for 3 minutes, using about 1.200 cuts

and a melody which does not change but increases its tempo in the last part of the film. Not a word is said - yet the critical view of the United States is brought home clearly and with crushing effect. The film is almost totally emotional.

But most directors intuitively work with a much larger time scale, using the whole range of human communication including speech to express their own views on life.

Because this is exactly what they do, whether they are drama directors and their story is wholly invented or they are news reporters at the battle field. They do it because they cannot do anything else. There exists no objective television.

During the last 8 years nothing has astonished me more than to find that most people, seem to believe that television can give a more true picture of "reality" - quotationmarks - than any other medium. They do not express this directly. Instead they say, after the courses we give them:
- I had no idea that so much work goes into television production.

Many people are very sensitive to false accents and react strongly against manipulation. Yet I dare say that far too few of them realize that their TV-screen always shows reality within a frame.

Suppose that I enter a room where a TV-recording is being done. I can see a lot of events, and I am free to choose what I want to watch and listen to. I am only but effectively limited by the so-called silent language, that is, my awareness of the existing social codes of communication.

But what does the camera do? It stares through its inbuilt frame and its superior but inhuman lenses at the part of the room which the director has decided. What goes on within this frame - and nothing else - is registered and later edited. In the same way the microphone magnifies and manipulates the sound.

All the information acquired in that way is inevitably moulded into a new, highly personal view of what really happened. I do not state that the director's view is less valuable or true than mine. But there is a difference of immense importance: His view is broadcast to millions of people.

The producer/director will inevitably be responsible for the selective perception of the masses.

He has the power to function as the retina and the cochlea of the multitude and to place his cameras and microphones in positions that the multitude will never reach.

Malignantly speaking he is the Peeping Tom of the masses, and that is, I am sorry to say, one of the main reasons of the tremendous development of television in the world.

If you are inclined to optimism, as Marshall McLuhan, you may call this process a part of the creation of the global village.

As Maletzke has shown in his "Psychology of Mass Media" the producer/director is as much a victim of prejudices as his fellow men. The restraining effect of the audience reaction on him may well be balanced by the hopes and ambitions created in the rather closed area of a modern radio and television organization. The imperceptible use of various devices to influence the audience will be silently envied and immideately copied, and since television creates taste as much as it follows taste one easily finds a self-propagating instrument of escape from reality developing.

In a vain effort to try to map the operation areas of a professional director we have counted the variables - or tricks, if you prefer - at his disposal. They can be found in the sound, in the lighting, in the sets, in the camera-angles, in the optics, in the camera

motor, the cutting table or the videotape-recorder, but also - as in radio - in the selection of his more or less professional actors. We have found some 60 - 80 variables, but since they can be put to a free interplay at the will of the director we have given up our ambition.

Anyway - all the professionals know these tricks. Does the audience know them? Who measures that?

My second suggestion, then, is that one gives equal importance to what is excluded as to what is broadcast in television.

Who measures the effects of the strongly emotional pictures? What was the effect of the world famous scene, where a Saigon police officer shot a North Vietnamese prisoner in the open street? What about the pictures of the burning Buddhist nuns? What about the pictures of the Tchecks sitting in front of the Soviet tanks?

Nobody knows.

All other comparisons left aside there are reasons to believe that those pictures- and others - have the same effect as the short dentistry film I mentioned in the beginning of my speech. They actually beat their way into the consciousness of the viewers. And they remain there.

In a haphazard way I have been asking people what they remember of the television programmes they have been watching during the last year. Almost invariably they mention programmes that have given them thrilling news or drama programmes with strong emotional impact.

The introduction of two TV- channels in Sweden has proven beyond doubt that the audience, given the choice, prefer sport, light entertainment or drama.

The serious information, difficult as it is in itself and further complicated by the problems of vizualising abstractions, is mostly left aside. It has been shown - also by our audience research department - that this is valid not only for the so-called high-consumers of television, who are less educated and more poor than the average. It is valid also for the low consumer, notably the intellectual.

My third an last suggestion is, then, that one should give close study to the emotional impact of television, not only the sex and violence part of it but the whole range of human emotions and prejudices.

A final reflection over a thesis from the BBC. There they say:
- Do never overestimate the knowledge of the viewers, do never underestimate their intelligence.

This sounds hopeful.

But if the thesis is not true - what then?

What are we doing with television?

Stockholm the 24th of April 1973.
Olle Lindgren